



Extra riders mean extra dangers

It was a great day for the young boy to be out of school because he could help his dad on the farm. That afternoon they would be using the tractor to feed livestock. The boy's father thought his son would be safe in the tractor cab, like he had been many other times. He didn't expect the cab door to pop open when the tractor went over a rut. Before the father could step on the brakes, his son fell out of the cab and was run over by the rear wheel of the tractor. The boy was crushed under the weight of the tractor and died later at a hospital. The heritage being passed from one generation to the next ended in a few tragic seconds.

The details of this case are fictitious, but similar tragedies have occurred in Iowa in recent years. Since 1990, 10 Iowa youth under the age of 19 died when they were run over by a tractor. In all cases, they were an extra rider.

In most injuries involving extra riders, victims fall off or are thrown from the tractor during a rough ride or a situation in which the tractor rolls over. When this occurs, extra riders can be run over by either the tractor or an implement being towed, or both. In an overturn, the tractor often falls on top of riders.

Children aren't the only victims. According to the Iowa Department of Public Health, at least five adults within the last five years have died or were injured when they were an extra rider.

The sad part is that these accidents can be prevented. This publication discusses serious risks for extra riders and suggests how to eliminate those risks.

Why the risk?

Tractors are not passenger vehicles. They are built for one person to control and perform specific tasks. Passengers on tractors, in fact, can interfere with safe operation of the tractor. The extra rider can distract the operator, block access to controls, or obstruct the operator's vision.

Newer model tractors are designed to provide protection for only one person, the operator. All tractors manufactured since 1976 have a special rollover protective structure, or ROPS, that provides a safe environment for the operator if the tractor rolls over. The use of seat belts on tractors with ROPS will protect the operator from serious injuries.

Extra riders have no such protection. There is no safe environment for extra riders on tractors. Older model tractors without ROPS can offer no rollover protection for operators or extra riders.

Many people have the mistaken idea that enclosed cabs protect extra riders. This notion only gives tractor operators a false sense of security. Many tractor runover deaths happen when the child falls out of an enclosed cab. An enclosed cab can reduce the chance that a rider will be bumped off a tractor, it cannot eliminate that risk. The small measure of protection from an enclosed cab is not a guarantee of safety for extra riders.

The only situation in which an extra rider should be allowed on a tractor is during professional instruction of new operators. These conditions are strictly controlled and the trainer should have several years of experience in this area.

Tractor safety

How much do you know ?

1. How many Iowa youth have died during the past five years when they were run over by a tractor?
a) none
b) five
c) 10
2. An enclosed cab is not designed to protect extra riders. True or false?
3. You only have to worry about extra riders who are children because adults can protect themselves on a tractor. True or false?
4. The following types of farm equipment are unsafe for extra riders:
a) tractor
b) all-terrain vehicle
c) pick-up truck cab
d) combine

See answers on back.

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Even in controlled situations, the professional trainer assumes some risk of being thrown off the tractor.

Causes of runover accidents

There are many reasons why extra riders are thrown from the tractor and usually only one result—death. Sudden stops, driving over holes, stumps and debris, or a sharp turn can cause the extra rider to lose footing or be tossed off the tractor. Even if the tractor does not overturn, extra riders may be thrown from the vehicle.

Operators often think they can stop the tractor in an accident, especially if the tractor is moving very slowly or no difficult tasks are being performed. The most common comment from people involved in tractor runovers is how quickly they happen.

Runovers also can occur when the tractor is involved in an accident. One common scene happens when the rider is thrown after the tractor hits a building, bridge, or another vehicle. If the tractor overturns, the operator and rider both are in danger.

The ‘no riders’ rule

The only way to prevent extra rider injuries or deaths is to prohibit riders on tractors. Make a permanent policy to never allow riders on tractors.

This may be a difficult rule to follow, especially in situations involving visitors or young children. Depending upon the age of the child, it may be helpful to explain what can happen to tractor riders. Very young children may understand the fact that they aren’t allowed to ride other heavy equipment, such as road graders or construction vehicles, either. They also may enjoy a

ride on other farm vehicles designed for passengers, such as farm trucks or four-wheel drive vehicles. A chance to sit in the operator’s seat while the engine is turned off and the key is removed also may satisfy a child’s curiosity.

Make sure all tractor operators observe the “no riders” rule. Discuss with family members and farm workers the importance of the policy. It’s also helpful to post “no riders” decals on all tractors to remind others about the policy.

The most effective way to observe the “no riders” rule is to eliminate the need for extra riders. Use or provide other vehicles that allow passengers, such as trucks or cars, when transportation is needed to fields or remote work sites.

Other problems

Other farm equipment may be unsafe for extra riders, too. All-terrain vehicles and skid steer loaders are designed for one person, as are riding lawnmowers.

The rule of thumb is to look for a seat for an extra rider, such as some combines that have an extra seat in the operator’s station. Seats for extra riders should be added only by the manufacturer because many factors are considered in the safety design. A makeshift seat added to a farm vehicle by the owner cannot assure safety.

Enforcement of a “no riders” rule may be the single most important way for tractor operators to protect other people in their operation. The rule may challenge years of tradition, but it provides a safer way to pass on agricultural heritage than to allow tractor rides.

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Tractor safety

What can you do?

A “no riders” rule for all tractors at all times may be the single best way you can assure the safety of others in your operation. Here are some tips:

- Discuss with family members and workers why a “no riders” rule is important.
- Apply “no riders” decals on all tractors and other farm equipment.
- Make sure all guests and hosts know your opinion about extra riders.
- Use a truck or car to haul passengers to fields or remote work areas.

Answers to quiz: 1-c; 2-True; 3-False; 4-a, b and sometimes d.

For more information

“No riders” decals may be purchased from the Farm Safety 4 Just Kids organization at (800)423-KIDS. For more information about tractor safety, the following publications are available at local extension offices:

■ *Use tractors with ROPS to save lives*, Pm-1265d.

■ *Safe operation of agricultural equipment*, Pm-646. (Fee for publication.)

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